

Dogs in Space: Putting Language Documentation on a Sound Footing

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As I have trained more and more upcoming documentary linguists I have come to new stances about the status of audio in language documentation though combining acoustic and psychoacoustic knowledge with accruing experimental evidence and practical experience.

Currently, audio recording forms a step in language data collection that is deemed obligatory yet is without methodologies or goals; audio is but an inconvenience on the way to transcription. On the other hand, it is widely agreed that documentary linguistics should be principally concerned with primary data and with achieving the "best record". Occupying the space between these contradictory positions are widely varying practices and narrow prescriptions for audio file formats. The real answer to the contradiction is that we need to formulate methodologies for creating and using audio that are informed by both acoustic principles and by principles and values of documentary linguistics, leading to an epistemology for audio within our field.